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ABSTRACT

This brief paper considers planning for the transition of students with disabilities from the school setting to adult life. First, "transition services" are defined according to requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The relationship of transition services to the student's Individualized Education Program is discussed, as is the transition plan and graduation requirements. Suggestions for beginning transition planning recommend the delivery of transition services through curricular and extracurricular activities in many settings. A transition checklist lists suggested planning activities for various time periods, including 4 to 5 years, 2 to 3 years, and 1 year before leaving the school district. (DB)

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National Transition Network

Parent Brief

Information on Transition Planning

Winter 1996

Transition Planning for Success in Adult Life

What Does *Transition Services* Mean?

Transition Services are defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 300.18, as a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

The coordinated set of activities must—

(1) be based upon the individual student's needs taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and

(2) include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional evaluation.

Growing up is not easy! It is even more complicated for young adults with disabilities. Far too many students with disabilities leave school lacking the academic, technical, and social skills necessary to find and/or maintain employment, and often the jobs they do find are low paying and offer no health benefits. Identifying the challenges students will face as adults, and preparing and assisting them to meet those demands successfully, requires careful transition planning beginning at the earliest age possible.

Transition Services and the IEP

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student, beginning no later than age 16, must include a statement of needed transition services. Federal law permits the provision of transition services for some students at age 14 or younger, particularly for those at risk of dropping out of school before age 16, or when the provision of these services would be beneficial to any student with a disability and have a positive effect on employment and independent living outcomes. The decision to provide transition services to students

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The National Transition Network is a collaboration of the University of Arkansas; Colorado State University; University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; University of Minnesota; PACER Center; Technical Assistance for Parent Programs; and the University of Vermont. Its headquarters are at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota, Wulling Hall, 86 Pleasant Street SE., Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 626-8200.

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younger than age 16 should be made by the IEP team.

Broadly defined, transition is an all-inclusive process that focuses on improving a student's employment outcomes, housing options, and social networks after leaving school. The transition plan provides the framework for identifying, planning, and carrying out activities that will help a student make a successful transition to adult life. It identifies the type of skills to be learned; and which transition services will be provided, when they will be provided, and the party responsible for providing them. Involving a team of people drawn from different parts of the student's school and community life, the transition planning process focuses on the unique needs and goals of the student.

Transition services can and should be delivered through curricular and extracurricular activities in many settings—*in academic and vocational classrooms, at home,* and *throughout the community*—to practice and reinforce newly acquired skills.

The specific needs of the student for post-secondary services should determine who is invited to the IEP transition meeting. It is important to have representatives from various adult agencies and organizations at the meeting, such as mental health agencies, vocational rehabilitation, community colleges, housing, and employment and training agencies. If the school does not invite representatives from adult agencies, the parent or student should do so. If representatives from the agencies do not attend the meeting, the school is required to "take other steps to obtain their participation" in planning the student's transition services. Although not specified in IDEA, these steps might include arranging for a subsequent IEP meeting to discuss transition issues, contacting a trained advocate, forwarding a copy of the IEP to the agency (with student and parent approval), and maintaining contact with the agency to promote their involvement.

The Transition Plan and Graduation

Students with disabilities can remain in school through age 21 if there are continuing transition needs. These may include, for example, the need to acquire skills necessary for independent living or employment. These needs must be stated in the IEP and must include community-based instruction, learning experiences, and other adult objectives. All provisions of due process in IDEA remain in place throughout the transition process.

Young adults who remain in school past the typical graduation date may be able to participate in the commencement activities without receiving their diploma. They would then receive their diploma upon completion of their transition objectives. However, in many state and local agencies, the right to receive transition services from the school district is terminated once the student receives a diploma, even if she/he is under 21. This can present complications for the student, because, before receiving the diploma, all their services were provided through one centralized system—the school district. Now the young adult becomes responsible for not only identifying appropriate adult services, but also for proving their eligibility to receive those services. Thus, it is critical that students and their parents are aware of and think about the school district's graduation requirements, and how the student's transition goals will be accomplished before all services from the school district have ceased.

How to Begin Transition Planning

Transition goals cannot be achieved in one year. Transition planning, services, and activities should be approached as a multi-year process. Young adults themselves, along with their parents, play an important role in the transition process. Granted, involving the student in his/her own transition planning is required by law, but perhaps the most important reason for student involvement in transition planning is to facilitate the development of his/her self-determination skills, for these are essential for the student to develop the ability to manage his or her own life.

To begin with, examine your family's values as well as your young adult's interests, skills, and desires for the future. Encourage your son or daughter to talk about their preferences for the future. These preferences should be the guide for the transition planning process. Involve your child in activities that help him/her become a good decision maker and develop self-advocacy skills. *(The Transition Checklist on page 3 can be used in developing the transition plan).*

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Transition Checklist

The following is a checklist of transition activities that you and your son or daughter may wish to consider when preparing transition plans with the IEP team. Your student's skills and interests will determine which items on the checklist are relevant. Use this checklist to ask yourself whether or not these transition issues should be addressed at IEP transition meetings. The checklist can also help identify who should be part of the IEP transition team. Responsibility for carrying out the specific transition activities should be determined at the IEP transition meetings.

Four to Five Years Before Leaving the School District

- ❒ Identify personal learning styles and the necessary accommodations to be a successful learner and worker.
- ❒ Identify career interests and skills, complete interest and career inventories, and identify additional education or training requirements.
- ❒ Explore options for post- secondary education and admission criteria.
- ❒ Identify interests and options for future living arrangements, including supports.
- ❒ Learn to communicate effectively your interests, preferences, and needs .
- ❒ Be able to explain your disability and the accommodations you need.
- ❒ Learn and practice informed decision making skills.
- ❒ Investigate assistive technology tools that can increase community involvement and employment opportunities.
- ❒ Broaden your experiences with community activities and expand your friendships.
- ❒ Pursue and use local transportation options *outside of family*.
- ❒ Investigate money management and identify necessary skills.
- ❒ Acquire identification card and the ability to communicate personal information.
- ❒ Identify and begin learning skills necessary for independent living.
- ❒ Learn and practice personal health care.

Two to Three Years Before Leaving the School District

- ❒ Identify community support services and programs (Vocational Rehabilitation, County Services, Centers for Independent Living, etc.)
- ❒ Invite adult service providers, peers, and others to the IEP transition meeting.
- ❒ Match career interests and skills with vocational course work and community work experiences.
- ❒ Gather more information on post secondary programs and the support services offered; and make arrangements for accommodations to take college entrance exams.
- ❒ Identify health care providers and become informed about sexuality and family planning issues.
- ❒ Determine the need for financial support (Supplemental Security Income, state financial supplemental programs, medicare).
- ❒ Learn and practice appropriate interpersonal, communication, and social skills for different settings (employment, school, recreation, with peers, etc.).
- ❒ Explore legal status with regards to decision making prior to age of majority.
- ❒ Begin a resume and update it as needed.
- ❒ Practice independent living skills, e.g., budgeting, shopping, cooking, and housekeeping.
- ❒ Identify needed personal assistant services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.

One Year Before Leaving the School District

- ❒ Apply for financial support programs. (Supplemental Security Income, Independent Living Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Personal Assistant Services).
- ❒ Identify the post-secondary school you plan to attend and arrange for accommodations.
- ❒ Practice effective communication by developing interview skills, asking for help, and identifying necessary accommodations at post secondary and work environments.
- ❒ Specify desired job and obtain paid employment with supports as needed.
- ❒ Take responsibility for arriving on time to work, appointments, and social activities.
- ❒ Assume responsibility for health care needs (making appointments, filling and taking prescriptions etc.).
- ❒ Register to vote and for selective service (if a male).

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with disabilities have opportunities to practice their skills in real life situations, the more comfortable and natural they will feel in those settings.

Conclusion

Throughout public school years, the district has had the responsibility of providing the services for the student with disabilities to become a successful learner. The transition from school to adulthood may be complicated because the adult system is very different: there are *many* public and private agencies that provide services for adults with disabilities. However, unlike educational services, there is no absolute entitlement to those services. In other words, different, more restrictive eligibility criteria, long waiting lists, and uncertain funding may keep a young adult from obtaining services upon leaving school. This is why transition planning at an early age is so critical.

Transition services and activities should provide young adults with disabilities with the necessary skills to make informed choices and decisions, and gain full inclusion in society in *all* aspects of their lives. ■

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